Book Reviews

Church: Charism and Power.
Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church.


The original subtitle of this book, when published in Portuguese in 1981, was "Essays in Militant Ecclesiology." This English translation carries a subtitle that suggests that here liberation theology "takes on" the institutional Roman church. The author, the Brazilian Franciscan theologian Leonardo Boff, is already well known for the "conversations" he was asked to hold with the prefect of the Vatican Congregation for Doctrine in September 1984.

Boff's basic endeavor is to argue with passion for the coming-to-be of a "popular church"—a church "from below," made up of the base communities whose main features he sketches in his eighth chapter, "Characteristics of the Church in a Class Society." Advocacy for such a church, running through these thirteen chapters (almost all previously published between 1974 and 1981) has been described by Cardinal Ratzinger as "a merciless and radical aggression against the institutional model of the Catholic Church" and as "an effort to reduce its structures to unacceptable caricatures."

With vigor and remarkable pedagogical (and polemical) gifts, Boff deals eloquently with a panorama of ecclesial models, with human rights violations within the Roman Catholic Church, with its pathologies and its abuses of power. He describes Christianity as "one huge syncretism," recasts long-held notions on "the teaching church and the learning church," and so forth, finally to hail the emergence of the communities "at the grassroots" among the poor and oppressed as the authentic form of the church of the future, alone truly capable of renewing the saving presence of the gospel in Latin America.

Cardinal Ratzinger has charged that the book is immoderate and pamphleteering in its language, offensive and unjust vis-à-vis both people and institutions of the Roman Catholic Church, that its critical stance would seem to borrow its perspectives from neo-Marxist inspiration rather than from gospel faith; that its theological conceptuality is often imprecise and ambiguous; that its views on church dogma and revelation, and on hierarchical authority depart considerably from normative Roman Catholic teaching. Boff's reply to this severe criticism has insisted that his positions were validly taken within an acceptable theological pluralism, and that his militancy derives from his passionate attachment both to the gospel and the church.

Church: Charism and Power will probably continue to fuel controversy, although those well acquainted with liberation theology will not find in it much that is significantly new. Surely the imperative for profound and ongoing reform in the church needs to be constantly reaffirmed. Surely too the promise of basic ecclesial communities should be proclaimed, serious problems notwithstanding. Undeniable forces of Word and Spirit are at work within them. But here both reaffirmation and proclamation have, not infrequently, a stridency and rhetoric bordering on harangue. One might ask, echoing some of the wise things Yves Congar has said of other books, if a more measured and more sober argument, with a greater sense of historical development and a more evident regard for fairness toward "the adversary" Boff has chosen to do battle with, might be not only more evangelical in spirit, but in the end more effective and more constructive for the very purposes these essays intend.

—C. G. Arevalo, S.J.

Salvation and Liberation.


In his critical analysis Leonardo Boff shows us how theological reflection on poverty and misery can lead to action. Faith as a motivating force for liberation and for salvation helps Christians to realize how they are being oppressed. Afterwards, it is only a matter of time before a process of liberation is initiated.

For Leonardo Boff liberation is an integral process and not a partial one. Its projection is not regional but global. Because poverty and misery are worldwide, and are one issue, it would fol-
commitment in faith, these companions in service shared deep personal friendships with one another. In August 1980 Carla Piette was killed when the jeep she and Ita Ford were driving was overturned by a flash flood. In December 1980 Maura Clark, who replaced Carla in Chalatenango, and Ita Ford were murdered on their return from the San Salvador airport.

The Same Fate as the Poor traces the personal stories of these three women. Their lives are the windows through which the author, Maryknoll Missioner Judith Noone, points to the suffering of thousands of people in Central and South America. The text weaves biographical material with the broader political history of Chile, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. By referencing the personal writings and the letters of the three Sisters, Judith Noone offers an analysis of the social and political realities of Central America, particularly El Salvador.

As a case study of United States missioners in service to the people of the troubled lands of Central and South America, The Same Fate as the Poor provides a believable glimpse of this ded-


Dussel, an Argentinian exponent of liberation theology, has written extensively in the area of philosophy and ethics, but in recent years he has majored in historical research as the head of CEHILA, the vast project for writing a new history of the church in Latin America. In this very accurate translation from Spanish by Alan Neely, we have a good example of the solid scholarship and difficult style that characterizes Dussel. In its original form the book was entitled “Hypothesis for a History of the Church in Latin America” and published in Barcelona, in 1967. That original hypothesis developed from 219 pages into the 1974 third edition of 459 pages that has served as the basis for this English translation.

The process explains the uneven character of the book both in structure and in content, and makes it difficult to recommend it as a textbook, in spite of the creativity of the method and the wealth of information and bibliography.

In Part One and appendixes I and II Dussel offers a careful explanation of the hermeneutical approach he has used. Biblical and theological terminology combined with Hegelian and existential philosophy give us a dense text, not always easy to grasp. The approach to Latin American history is based on the Marxist-oriented theory of dependence as it is evidenced, for instance, in the periodization chosen (Appendix II). The period between 1492 and 1808 is covered in thirty-four pages, in Part Two. The period between 1808 and 1962 is covered in forty-eight pages in Part Three. Part Four, the period described as a time of “liberation” (1962–1979), is given a total of 128 pages. Such an unbalanced treatment of the material reflects enthusiasm for liberation theology and attributes unique significance to these seventeen years that Dussel sees as “pregnant with meaning and significant events” (p. 125). The problem is that unless the period 1492–1962 is better understood we do not have enough elements to decide if the “liberation” period really is what Dussel claims it to be. It is understandable that, with the vast amount of material covered, some factual mistakes have slipped by. Dussel says, “In Peru the movement for independence began in 1809, and the first rebellion or uprising occurred in Pumacahua” (p. 88). Actually, Pumacahua is not a place but the name of a revolutionary leader in the uprising of August 1814 in Cuzco. The maps and charts at the end of the book are very helpful.

—Samuel Escobar

Changing the World: An Agenda for the Churches.


Cosmao, the director of the Lebret Faith and Development Center in Paris, presents his formulae for “changing the world” in thirty-three theses, beginning with the assertion that “before the end of this millennium, humanity will have to make a collective commitment to shaping a habitable earth” (p. 1). However desirable such a proposal may be in itself, its style is indicative of the author’s tendency to deliver presumptive judgments from a theoretical perspective rather than to examine data in detail and to argue his position in dialogue with other positions.

Depending on a reader’s own sympathies, the author’s explanations may seem analytically perceptive or theoretically idealistic or excessively judgmental. For example, the claim that “the underdevelopment of some is the result of the development of others” (p. 15) has an appealing simplicity, but does such a thesis take seriously the ambiguities of actual historical development? Similarly, the thesis that

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John T. Ford, currently Associate Professor of Theology at the Catholic University of America, has also served on the staff of Holy Cross Missions, Washington, D.C.
"left to their own inertia, societies come to be structured in terms of inequality" (p. 34) suggests that the author already has an a priori picture of how societies should be constituted or at least how they ought to be evaluated.

Credit must be given the author for elaborating a systematically coherent schema, in which his sociopolitical premises serve as the logical substrata for his historical-theological judgments; however, one wonders whether the desire for trenchant and tidy theses has really become a temptation: Can any such theoretical construct really ever serve as "an agenda for the churches"? Or must one be content with a series of provisional agenda as the churches continuously search for divine guidance in the irreducible uncertainties of history?

Readers' reactions to this book will likely depend on their own sociopolitical-theological viewpoints. Those who basically sympathize with the author's perspective will presumably find their convictions reinforced. And even those who do not agree will be challenged to examine their own premises about the church's role in a changing world.

—John T. Ford

Paths of Liberation: A Third World Spirituality.


Bakole wa Ilunga, the Roman Catholic archbishop of Kananga, in Zaire, starts with a radical analysis of his community. "The old framework that guaranteed a certain balance has collapsed and no new one has yet been found to replace it" (p. 12).

The Old Testament "search for God who sets us free" ends in a way during the exile when "groups of believers rediscover God in their lives: the poor of Yahweh" (p. 67). Jesus, one of those poor, lives the fullness of this liberating life, leaving communities that do the same.

The conclusions drawn by the author do not get stuck in mere piety. He develops a robust, liberating praxis. Zaire should be liberated from "the interests of worldwide capitalism," whose "chief weapon is not their military might but the fact that we depend on them even for our food!" (p. 144). "Increased agricultural production is therefore a prime necessity" (p. 144). "The liberation of society from corruption is the absolutely necessary condition for our progress" (p. 154). To realize those elementary objectives, Christian communities should form "chains of honesty" with "a renewed consciousness" (p. 156). In very many ways this is an amazing book. Here is an African bishop opting for a radical liberation theology. The book explains very clearly the role of conscientiation. That is what should happen to the Zairean Christian communities in order for them to regain "their authenticity." Whether those communities are going to be helped very much by this intelligent, but rather lengthy book remains a question.

The book is written for those who have the courage to let people come to

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themselves, a courage that is rarely found among leaders in Africa, the ec-
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fresh breath, and so recommendable.
—J. G. Donders

**Broken Bread and Broken Bodies: The Lord’s Supper and World Hunger.**


There is much of value in this latest book by Joseph Grassi, professor of reli-
gious studies at the University of Santa Clara. In a straightforward manner he
sketches the context of Jesus’ message and ministry and shows how both carry
implications for the transformation of political and social life. Discipleship
demands imitation and collaboration with Jesus in this inner-worldly reali-
zation of the kingdom. Grassi develops this position with appeals to both the
wisdom (“the listening heart”) and prophetic traditions, as well as with a
creative use of the “abba” motif. Attention is also given to the promi-
nence of the feeding miracles. Particularly suggestive for me are Grassi’s
remarks on the importance of “food language” for the early Christian com-
munities and the cosmic dimensions of the Eucharist celebration. An appendix
usefully summarizes statements by the Vatican and by the World Council of
Churches dealing with the agonizing problem of world hunger.

Finally, though, the book promises more than it delivers. It concludes
where it should have begun. The book’s stated purpose is “to point out how
a deep understanding of and participation in the Eucharist can mobilize
effective individual and community action to start a great miracle of sharing
that will lead to the end of hunger” (p. x). The author’s concrete suggestion to
begin the mobilization toward the miracle: each parish or congregation should
form a hunger committee. Useful and necessary undoubtedly, but finally ob-
vious. This is the kind of book that will likely be read by those already on such
a committee. More attention as to how awareness and commitment can be
elicted from others who are regular attenders of the Eucharist would have
made this a particularly fruitful work.
—William McConville, O.F.M.

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William McConville, O.F.M., is the Director of the
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Jeanne Marie Lyons, M.M., author of Mary- 
knoll’s First Lady, and a former college teacher and administrator, is at present engaged full time in literary work, writing, editing, translating.
She has been in most of the countries where Maryknoll Sisters are located, but her longtime assignment has been at the Maryknoll Sisters Center, Maryknoll, N.Y.

International Bulletin of Missionary Research
Pluralism: Challenge to World Religions


Harold Coward, professor of religious studies at the University of Calgary, Canada, in his book *Pluralism: Challenge to World Religions*, deals with one of the major problems of human and religious coexistence and Christian presence in the world.

In the first five chapters he examines the ways in which Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism have reacted and are reacting to the challenge of pluralism. His synthesis of diverse positions within their historical perspective is outstanding. The author offers a global perspective that appears to be in agreement with his own preferences and conclusions: "The dialogical approach, perhaps the most promising of all, emphasizes both the universality of God and the human need for complete commitment to the particular truth of the worshipper's religion" (p. 45).

We can agree with the author's analysis of the presuppositions upon which the religious dialogue of the future should be grounded. The six key propositions are these: (1) that in all religions there is experience of a reality that transcends human conception; (2) that that reality is conceived in a plurality of ways both within each religion and among all religions and that the recognition of plurality is necessary both to safeguard religious freedom and to respect human limitations; (3) that the pluralistic forms of religion are instrumental in function; (4) that due to our finite limitations and our simultaneous need for commitment to a particular experience of transcendent reality, our particular experience, though limited, will function in an absolute sense as the validating criterion for our own personal religious experience; (5) that the Buddha's teaching of critical tolerance and moral compassion should always be observed; and (6) that through self-critical dialogue we must penetrate ever further into our own particular experience of transcendent reality (and possibly into the transcendent reality of others) [pp. 105-6].

The contact and openness to other cultures have been considered both as challenges and, at various times, as dangers by Christians. According to the dominant Catholic view today, such challenges have been overcome in a positive way, at least insofar as truth is concerned. In this study certain aspects of Christianity have been somewhat forgotten and the various religions are viewed primarily through their written records. The real situation seems to me at once richer and more complicated. In this line I would like to call attention to several points of weakness in this treatment. Two that stand out are the oversimplified treatment of the Greek influence on Christianity in the relationship between the duality of matter and spirit (p. 18) and the omission of the great efforts at inculturation in post-Renaissance missionary activities in Asia, particularly the work of early Jesuits like Ricci and Di Nobili (pp. 22, 72). The unilateral application to the Orthodox churches of the view that all authority in both church and the world is referred directly to God (p. 27) was commonly held also in Western Christianity. The theocentric approaches of modern theologians like Paul Tillich, John Hick, and Wilfred Cantwell Smith (p. 45) are in line with the Orthodox churches, for which nevertheless the Christological councils, on whom the author lays the blame (p. 14), were of paramount importance.

Some of the principles upon which this work is based seem questionable to me. Here I mention three points.

1. A valid theology for all believers in the different religions is proposed (pp. 101ff.). To me this would seem impossible. While admitting that Christian theology must be contextualized, also in the realm of existing religious pluralism (p. 94) the ultimate criterion of theology, its *objectum quo*, always remains faith and comprehensibility, which is valid only for someone who has that faith.

2. The reexamination and reinterpretation of the uniqueness of Jesus (pp. 14, 44) are proposed as a condition for an adequate theology of dialogue. In my view an authentic theology of
dialogue can be made, at the same time confessing the uniqueness of Christ, which remains central in the experience of the Christian message.

3. The New Testament Christologies are treated disjunctively (pp. 17f.). To me it would seem, rather, that one must consider them in an integrative and complementary sense, as the mainstream of the Christian tradition has done.

—Marcello Zago, O.M.I.

The Gospel in Art by the Peasants of Solentiname.


Missionaries learn to reread and to recontemplate the Gospels through the eyes and hearts of the people with whom they live and work. The Gospel in Art by the Peasants of Solentiname provides a taste of that experience for Christians who do not have the privilege of pilgrimhood through unknown lands and language. A new depth of faith is expressed in the words and pictures of the people of Nicaragua, a simple people formed by suffering and repression, and transformed by struggle toward liberation. They dare to risk resurrection by taking on the blessings of the Beatitudes in spite of the clearly stated consequences.

The paintings are a classic example of folk art, with a directness and simplicity reminiscent of Henri Rousseau. The artists are self-taught, and use a rich sense of color and a keen eye for detail to tell the Gospel story.

The words of the peasants as they reflect together on the gospel flesh out the Good News in the context of their own historical experience. Just as the poverty and oppression of his people called Jesus to challenge the structures of his society, so too, these elements in their lives call the people of Nicaragua into the arena of political/economic activity.

Rebecca: “From the moment of his birth, God chose conditions like the poorest person's, didn't he? I don't think God wants great banquets or a lot of money or for business to make profits off the celebration of his birth” [p. 10].

Olivia: “The Father has given that token to the Son, the token of love. Because he wants liberation, and liberation could come only through his death. Society couldn't be changed, the world couldn't be changed, made different without that death. Death horrifies everyone; he felt that horror; he wanted another way out, but there was no other way out” [p. 54].

Olivia: “The news is not only about this resurrection but about ours” [p. 66].

This book is not only about the life and faith of peasant people in a foreign place. It is about the life and faith of every pilgrim person on earth struggling to understand the life of Jesus.

—Julie Miller, M.M.

Sister Julie Miller, a Maryknoll Missioner, has worked in Nicaragua since 1975, first in pastoral work in a rural section of the country and most recently as a member of the mental-health team in the regional hospital in Leon and as assistant professor in the medical school.
Hoping against All Hope.

For those of us who have experienced the foundations of regional and global movements committed to the gospel vision of peace and justice for all of God's people, the person of Dom Helder Camara requires no introduction. However, we must realize that the present generation may not share our memories of the diminutive Brazilian bishop who dared to be a "voice for the voiceless" in a time when church leaders were more distinguished for being prudently noncommittal than courageously audacious. The tendency to assume that "everyone" knows the heroic story of Dom Helder Camara and the historical context in which he demonstrated his witness to the body of Christ that was being starved, beaten, persecuted, and crucified (in Brazil and throughout the world) may be an overestimation. For this reason, the Foreword by Mario von Galli serves the interests of younger readers as well as readers who are not familiar with the specifics of Dom Helder's past.

The themes of the twenty-three reflections in Hoping against All Hope have been organized in such a way that the words that Dom Helder speaks are words written for the 1980s. He addresses the struggles and fears that are shared by all people who are committed to building a better world, regardless of whether they have come from countries that are rich or countries that are poor. The thoughts and prayers are founded upon a lived experience of seventy-five years of faith, hope, and love. The life and the spirit of Dom Helder continue to rise above the systems of dehumanization, egoism, and terror that ravage our world. Through the insights and prophetic questions that he poses, his deepest desire is to encourage those who have labored beside him in the past to entrust the vision of the kingdom of God to a generation of young people who must be empowered to believe that there is purpose in "hoping against all hope."

—Margaret E. Guider, O.S.F.


This is a doctoral dissertation done under the guidance of Professor Peter Beyerhaus at Tübingen, Germany. Sumithra has confined himself to the writings of Thomas from 1954 to 1976. From this period 380 books and articles are listed; sadly, Joyful & Triumphant is omitted, the writing that gives perhaps the clearest insight into Thomas’s personal faith. Sumithra’s conclusion is that “Thomas’s theology, being an
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Readers of Thomas’s work who find this conclusion surprising will also be surprised to know that Thomas accepts the impersonal brahman of the Vedanta (pp. 132, 301, 334) and denies the lordship of Christ (p. 337), that “his theology makes Christ marginal, almost as an appendage” (p. 322), and that “biblical categories are irrelevant to his system” (p. 323). These conclusions are reached by a method sustained throughout the book: short extracts of Thomas’s writings are quoted and then “interpreted.” A few examples will indicate the method. Thus Thomas writes: “When the Christian Church speaks of ‘original sin’ it means that this self-centricty is a fact for all men in all conditions of society, so that self-interest and self-righteousness are perennially present in man’s life.” Sumithra comments: “Thus, for Thomas, Original Sin means universal sality of sin, not that every single individual is a sinner” (pp. 122 f.). Thomas writes: “St. Paul sees in the risen Christ ‘the first fruits’ of the recreation of humanity, the inauguration of a movement through which Christ establishes his reign over all rule and authority . . . .” Sumithra comments that this shows “the understanding of resurrection as happening in the subjective, spiritual world” (p. 160). Thomas writes: “God must be worshipped through Jesus Christ as an essential part of the community life.” Sumithra comments, “Thus, Jesus being God-for-man in Thomas’s thinking, he takes a place similar to that of a demiurge” (p. 171). I have marked about sixty “interpretations” of this kind—plainly remote to the point of contradiction from the text.

Why is Sumithra unable to understand Thomas’s thought? It is because he begins from a so-called classical view of mission, loosely put together from elements of Ziegenbalg and Carey (pp. 1-9) and later amplified as “the redemption of a person from the wrath of God, through his faith in the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ for his sins, so that the sinner is forgiven and joins the Church for further nurture in the spiritual life” (p. 203). Missing from this definition is any reference to the corporate and cosmic dimensions of Christ’s work or to the ethical implications of salvation. Other elements in the author’s framework become clear as the study proceeds. God’s transcendence is defined in natural-theology terms—“separation from man” (p. 171), “omniscience and omnipotence” (p. 324), and total uninvolved in history (p. 267). Sumithra cannot, therefore, accept Thomas’s more biblical categories for describing transcendence (p. 165). True to his natural-theology approach, Sumithra sees “body” and “soul” as “substances” whose separateness must be affirmed, and therefore rejects Thomas’s biblical perception of the body-soul unity. There is no place for the cosmic Christ of Ephesians and Colossians. With this natural theology goes a strict individualism. The Holy Spirit works with individuals, not with the church (p. 334), which is defined as “an impersonal organization” (p. 219), and it is not surprising that God is understood to be “a person” (p. 133).

The thought of M. M. Thomas needs and deserves thorough theological study. Unfortunately, this volume does not contribute to this task.

—Lesslie Newbigin
Fire Beneath the Frost: The Struggles of the Korean People and Church.


Prepared as the basic study on Korea for 1984-85, the centennial of Protestant work in Korea, this book presents the history, religions, and socio-economic conditions of Korea, together with illustrative stories, myths, and poems, and a detailed Study Action Guide. The author, a missionary in Korea from 1952 to 1963 and now chief executive, World Division, United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries, and her colleagues, another American human rights activist and three expatriate Korean exponents of "Minjung (People's) Theology," make clear in the "Purpose" (p. 84) and elsewhere their "view that the churches of Korea have been most truly the church when standing with the poor and oppressed" (p. 2). This view has determined not only the contents but also the study questions, lists of resources, and action suggestions. The issues raised are valid and need to be faced by the Korean churches and Christians everywhere. The plight of the exploited, the dangers in development, and the pervasive influences of the major powers are serious questions for Korea and the whole world.

In their concentration on this particular theological view, however, the authors have forgotten that this is supposed to be a "comprehensive look" (flyleaf) at Korea and have ignored all other considerations and interpretations of events. They tend to denigrate the vitality of the Korean churches, their enthusiasm for sharing their faith, and their involvement in a multitude of social-action programs. The criticism, much of it justified, of the military-industrial-multinational power structure ignores the important advances in health and standards of living and the reality of ideological conflict. Their view of the church is not shared by the vast majority of Korean Christians and it is extremely regrettable that the publishers have not made available a wider spectrum of materials. Nevertheless, Christians of Korea, and of America, ignore these issues at their peril.

---Horace G. Underwood

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his liberating ministry. The three authors, Ellacuria, Galilea, and Croatto, try to avoid both the “naive,” “apolitical” image of Christ and the easy identification of a “revolutionary Christ,” while underscoring the relevance of the Christ of the gospel to the situation of poverty and oppression in Latin America.

Finally, in Part Four, we have a more critical approach, pointing to the sociopolitical options behind traditional Christologies and to the importance of a Christology of liberation for the present task of evangelization in Latin America.

After reading this sample it cannot be said anymore that there is a “Christological vacuum” in Latin American theology. But, as the editor reminds us in his introductory chapter, this is just a beginning and it represents an invitation to an unfinished task. The direction is: “First, the Christ of the gospels must be rescued . . . by means of a critical and topical rereading”; and “Secondly, this cannot be a mere exercise in intellectuality and erudition . . . . it is active commitment itself, the historical praxis of the oppressed . . . .” (p. 5).

This is a volume to work through. Unfortunately, it does not incorporate some of the more recent and systematic contributions from Latin American Christologies, like Jon Sobrino’s Christology at the Crossroads (Orbis Books, 1978; published in Spanish in 1976), Hugo Echegaray’s The Practice of Jesus (Orbis Books, 1984; published in Spanish in 1980), and Juan Luis Segundo’s Jesús de Nazaret y el hombre común (Madrid: Cristiandad, 1982).

—Mortimer Arias

African Theologies Now: A Profile.


African Theologies Now is a very small book about a very big theme. It is intended for “the ordinary reader who is not a theologian.” As far as that intention goes, the book is a useful introduction to contemporary discussion of African theology.

Father Justin Ukpong is lecturer at the Catholic Institute of West Africa, Port Harcourt, Nigeria. His book confines itself to three areas, which he names as “African inculturation theology,” “South African black theology,” and “African liberation theology.” He sees the main issues as being, respectively, “culture, colour and poverty” (p. 5), and gives more weight to the first than to the other two. Obviously there are other concerns of African theology, which cannot be allocated to these categories.

The book is written in a clear and simple style, which should make it valuable as an introduction to the subject. Father Ukpong is familiar with writings of African theologians who have contributed something to the three concerns. However, in the more biblical and historical works, he says little or nothing. While he cites many of the works by African theologians, it would have been of further value if the book had included a short select bibliography, to help the reader who might wish to read further.

—John Mbiti

Christian Perspectives on Women’s Issues

Edited by John C. B. and Ellen Low Webster

The contributors to this book—women and men, Protestants and Catholics, from the third world as well as the first—explore issues that affect the image of women, their role in the church, and their status. They bring together two major concerns of the church, overseas missions and the role of women, and examine these concerns from an ecumenical perspective. Paper, $9.95 (Tentative)

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by Diane Tennis

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